Anthony Chambers, trans. & ed., Ueda Akinari, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*

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If one had two words to describe Anthony Chamber's translation of Ueda Akinari's classic *Ugetsu monogatari* (Tales of Moonlight and Rain, 1776), they would be: "accurate" and "accessible." In contrast to the older translations of the work, Chambers does a graceful job of letting "the text speak for itself as directly as possible, rather than embroidering it with interpretations and explanations (34)." His translation is elegant without being ornamental, and his streamlining of the footnotes and grammatical style make this translation a highly accessible text for a variety of readers.

As the subtitle suggests, this translation also includes a short yet informative study of *Ugetsu* in the introduction. Each story also begins with some background information to help contextualize the text. Specifically, Chambers focuses on the origin of the Japanese titles, characters, place names, time period, affinities, and "other observations," which include information about modern authors and films who were influenced by Akinari's work. I will first comment on the content of the study, then discuss the translation itself. Since various translations of *Ugetsu* already exist, the most famous one being Leon Zolbrod's,[1] this review will compare the two translations in order to highlight Chambers' new approaches and contributions.

The introduction offers succinct summaries of Akinari's life and the historical background of the composition of the *yomihon*. Unlike Zolbrod, who focused on Akinari's two most famous works, *Ugetsu monogatari* and *Harusame monogatari* (Tales of the Spring Rain, 1809), Chambers also brings in his lesser-known works like *Tandai shôshinroku* (A Record of Daring and Prudence, 1808) and *Shodô kikimimi sekenzaru* (A Worldly Monkey Who Hears About Everything, 1766). He reveals how *Ugetsu* represents the culmination of Akinari's goal as a writer to go beyond the vulgar (*zoku*) and attain elegance/refinement (*ga*), and he also shows how this "ghost story" cannot be understood without studying its ties to nativism, when he states: "While Akinari rejected Norinaga's uncritical embrace of ancient mythology, he did share the National Learning scholars' propensity to 'celebrate the mysterious wonders of life,' which takes an especially vivid form in *Moonlight and Rain* (10)." Chambers thus successfully captures Akinari's multiple faces as a doctor, a *bunjn*, a *kokugaku* scholar, and a *haikai* poet.

Similarly, Chambers also emphasizes the unique, hybrid nature of *Ugetsu.* He claims that the two elements of *Ugetsu* that were considered to be new in his era were "the adaptation of Chinese stories and the strange or anomalous (13)," and he goes on to summarize the various narrative techniques Akinari deploys in the text—mixture of allusions to Chinese sources and to Japanese classics, structures resembling no plays, method of poetic *honkadori* (allusive variation). He carefully lists the original Chinese sources that inspired the *yomihon,* but he also argues that Akinari succeeded in creating a psychological complexity nonexistent in the Chinese vernacular tales:

> As Robert Ford Campany has pointed out, the authors of Chinese anomaly accounts were not concerned with "the 'inner' nature toward perfection through self-cultivation, (*xing*) of intellectual and emotional disposition, nor the structure of the self's ascent but precisely humankinds *taxonomic place* among other kinds of beings, the nature of its *relationships* to other kinds." In *Moonlight and Rain*, by contrast, it is precisely the characters' inner natures… that concerned Akinari (15-16, italics in the original).

As evident from above, Chambers' understanding of "the strange or anomalous" is informed by scholarship on Asian ghost stories, and he is careful not to call *Ugetsu* simply a "supernatural" or a "fantastic" piece, which would place it within the Western rubric of fantastic fiction. He aptly argues that such terms should not be equated to the concept of Japanese ghost stories or *kaidan*, for each culture has different definitions of what falls under the category of unnatural or marvelous.

One of the most informative parts in his intro-

[1] Zolbrod, Leon M., trans. and ed. *Ugetsu Monogatari: Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Complete English Version of the Eighteenth-Century Japanese Collection of Tales of the Supernatural* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1974).

duction is the section on *Ugetsu*'s settings and structure, both of the story and of the compilation as a whole. He offers a comprehensive chart of the settings and the dates of each story, observing that all stories except "The Owl of the Three Jewels" take place in pre-Tokugawa era, and none are set in the three great cities. He sees this as a method of "distancing," where the specificity of the places (provinces) "has the effect of grounding the strange beings and events in the real world, thus lending plausibility to the stories (20)." It is also a technique for purposefully avoiding censorship, for "anomalies, even when they occur in distant provinces, represent disorder (21)."

For the structure of the stories, Chambers bases his analysis on Campany's work on the structure of Chinese anomalous accounts. These accounts follow a certain order, beginning with place settings, foreshadowing or hints, pivot, climax, outcome, and impact (an additional commentator appears at the end and offers his viewpoint). Chambers also compares *Ugetsu* to the structure of nô plays, where the *shite* often encounters the *waki* in a ghostly form. This kind of narratological analysis provides an interesting tool for understanding the stories. He also lists various theories on the structure of the entire compilation, such as Takada Mamoru's analysis, which has revealed various links between the stories like Confucianism, notion of loyalty/fidelity, image of water, animal imagery, cruel man/woman, jealous women, lust, Chinese verse, and philosophical dialogue between the dead and the living. Other connecting themes include the varying danger of the anomalous beings and the kind of characters, who are often steadfast or undependable.

It is only because the translator's readings are so engaging that the study would have benefited from an elaboration on his thoughts. One place where Chambers could have expanded on his thoughts was in the "Other Observations" section, preceding each chapter. These observations vary from story to story, and they are somewhat unbalanced. In fact, he omits them for "The Kibitsu Cauldron" and "On Poverty and Wealth." Specifically, I wanted to hear more about the ambiguities he encountered in the text, both grammatically and content-wise. For example, Chambers ultimately reads *Ugetsu* as a complicit text that "indirectly draws attention to the orderliness of the Tokugawa era and reinforces the normality of the center, the big city (21)." However, scholars such as Moriyama Shigeo have suggested otherwise, reading "Shiramine" as a subversive work, for it revolved around the ghost of Emperor Sutoku, whom the Tokugawa *bakufu* feared.[2] Also, the ending poem that reads, "one hundred families will return to the house," has often been read by scholars like Takada Mamoru as containing a double entendre, one celebrating the regime, the other criticizing it. [3] The notion and the Chinese character for *kaeru* (return) is often an ironic one in *Ugetsu*, in which characters often do not return in time ("The Reed-Choked House") or come back in ghostly forms ("Chrysanthemum Vow"). Also, in his commentaries for *Nihon koten bungaku zenshû*, Takada also raises interesting questions about the "morals" of the story at the end, such as the one in "The Chrysanthemum Vow"—"Truly, one must not form bonds of friendship with a shallow man (88)"—is of highly ambiguous nature, for it does not seem to point directly to the villain Akana Tanji, and the identity of this "shallow man" remains mysterious.[4] As astute as Chambers' observations may be, his analysis occasionally offers too clear a reading for this hybrid, ambiguous text, and this clarity causes some conflict with his goal of letting the text "speak for itself."

Regarding the translation itself, three points of comparison between Zolbrod's version and Chambers' should be highlighted. The first point deals with how accurately the translation reflects the original in terms of its structure and narrative voice. This is probably the biggest difference between the two translations, and Chambers deserves praise for accomplishing this difficult task. Whereas Zolbrod attempted to transform the language of *Ugetsu* into "common English" and hence changed the original format of the work and added his own interpretations, Chambers, for the most part, does not touch the formatting; his English sentences directly reflect the position of their Japanese counterparts. Consider the difference in this passage from "Asaji ga yado":

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[2] Moriyama Shigeo. *Genyô no bungaku* [Literature of the Fantastic] (Tokyo: San'ihi shobô, 1982), 11.

[3] Takada Mamoru, *Shinpen: Edo gensô bungakushi* [Notes on Edo Period Fantastic Literature] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 2000), see 34-35 and 49-50.

[4] Nakamura Yukihiko, Takada Mamoru, and Nakamura Hiroyasu, eds. *Hanabusa sôshi, Nishiyama monogatari, Ugetsu monogatari, Harusame monogatari.* Nihon koten bungaku zenshû, vol.48 (Tokyo: Shôgakukan, 1973). Takada Mamoru is the annotator for *Ugetsu*. See footnote 24, p.305.

> "Miyagi is not here! Where could she have gone?" he thought, upon finding that she no longer lay with him. "Have I been bewitched by a fox?" (Zolbrod, quotations in the original, 128)
>
> And where, come to think of it, had his wife gone, who had been lying with him? She was nowhere in sight. Perhaps this was the doing of a fox? (Chambers 100)

Zolbrod often inserts quotation marks and other indicators, including clear subject pronouns in order to allow the reader to read *Ugetsu* like an English novel. However, Chambers remains more true to the original by returning the multiple, distinctive voices to the single narrator. In the first story, "Shiramine," this is also evident. Zolbrod uses first-person narration for this story, in contrast to Chambers, who carefully chooses to use third-person ("he"). His maneuver also makes more sense when considering the fact that the name of Saigyô appears in the text at one point, turning it into what English speakers would associate with a third-person narrative. It is impressive how close his translation comes to capturing the uniqueness of the original narrative voice that encapsulates all of its characters' voices while having a voice of its own.

Second, the two translators' styles contrast significantly. Zolbrod's tends to be more ornamental and loaded, while Chamber's style flows more smoothly, for his writing is succinct and direct. Readers who are familiar with Zolbrod's translation may be torn as to which style better captures the language of *Ugetsu.* On the one hand, Chambers does an excellent job in translating one of the more poetic and beautiful passages in *Ugetsu*, using his simpler style. This is part of the *michiyuki* passage in "The Carp of My Dreams":

> The moon resting on the waters of the berry-black night shone clear on the peak of Mount Kagami and drove the shadows from the eighty corners of the eighty ports to cast a lovely scene. Okino Isle, Chikubu Isle—the vermillion fence reflected in the waves startled me. (116-117)

Chambers has obviously taken great care in translating this famous passage. He chooses "berry black" for *nubatama* (Zolbrod just uses "pure black"), and just as in the original, he repeats the word *yaso* in "*yaso no minato no yaso*": "eighty corners of the eighty ports" (compared to Zolbrod's "countless ports of Yaso Harbour," 137).

On the other hand, however, he sometimes oversimplifies the original Japanese. Zolbrod translates the phrase "*sugomashiki kokochi serareru*" as "An uncanny terror gripped my heart," as opposed to Chambers' "he began to sense something awful." The first version is not exactly accurate, and the use of the word "uncanny" recalls the language of European gothic or romantic fiction. Chambers' choice of "awful," on the other hand, does not capture the terror embedded in the word *sugomashiki*. Similarly, I also wondered about his choice of some of the key words, especially in "The Chrysanthemum Vow." While Zolbrod translates the phrase *keihaku no hito*, which appears in the opening and in the "moral" at the end of the story, as "falsehearted man," Chambers calls it "shallow man." Also, Zolbrod translates the word *makoto* in the following as "faithfulness": "My brother regarded his chrysanthemum tryst as a matter of honour. By giving up his life and traveling a hundred leagues, he showed the height of faithfulness (119)." Chambers, in contrast, uses "sincerity": "My brother, cherishing his chrysanthemum pledge, gave up his life and traveled one hundred ri: this is the ultimate sincerity (88)." On the one hand, Zolbrod tends to read more into the original words, and his translations often come off as wordy and overdramatic. However, Chambers' uses of "shallow" or "sincerity" also sounds strange and lacking, especially when the latter is supposed to capture Sôemon's devotion to come back to his brother/lover figure Samon. In moments like these, Chambers could have applied more complicated or loaded words.

The third main difference lies in the use of footnotes. Chambers greatly reduces the number of footnotes in his translation, compared to Zolbrod, who meticulously and almost obsessively notes each difficult phrase and historical note. Both scholars base their footnotes on the annotations made by two great scholars of Akinari's works: Uzuki Hiroshi (*Ugetsu monogatari hyôshaku*) and Nakamura Yukihiko (annotator for both Nihon koten bungaku zenshû and Nihon koten bungaku taikei versions of *Ugetsu*). Overall, Chambers skillfully reduces the number of footnotes, making the collection much more accessible for a wider readership. However, I must confess that the use of endnotes and footnotes in his translation was the most confusing editorial factor in the book. As stated earlier, Chambers begins each story with a short introduction, which

includes information about the title, historical background, etc. Sometimes he refrains from mentioning these by footnoting them in the text. There are also footnotes (at the bottom of the page) and endnotes (at the end of each chapter). The footnotes are organized by line numbers, but since there are no line numbers on the actual pages, the corresponding phrases are extremely difficult to find. The endnotes are informative and are much more streamlined than Zolbrod's. The result, then, is that the reader must search for information in three different places—the introductions, footnotes, and endnotes—which could be a very frustrating process. Even though the introductions are helpful, one wonders if he could not have compiled at least the footnotes and the endnotes together. At the end of the day though, Chambers' collection will strongly appeal to educators who want to teach *Ugetsu*, for students will not be bogged down with unnecessary notes and descriptions.

Overall, Chamber's new translation is an impressive accomplishment that beautifully captures the strange world of *Ugetsu*. His rendering and study should prove engaging for scholars wanting to reread the classic, and instructors and students will benefit from both the translation and the informative and convenient introductory notes, along with the bibliography, which lists all previous English translations of Akinari's work. Chambers, in the opening, admits that it is impossible to fully reproduce the unique, hybrid language of *Ugetsu*, but out of all existent translations, this one comes the closest to accomplishing that daunting task.